

Remarks Following a Luncheon With Military Personnel at Marine Corps
Base Quantico, Virginia
September 14, 2007

It's my honor to come to Quantico to speak to our general officers—our officers and sergeants who train young lieutenants. And I had a chance to speak to some of the lieutenants. First of all, I—my first impression is, it's an amazing country where people volunteer in the face of danger. A lot of these lieutenant—Marine lieutenants fully understand the nature of the world in which we live. And they're willing to serve. They're willing to serve to protect and defend this country, and they're willing to serve to help shape the conditions so that the world is more peaceful.

I told them about my speech last night. I told them that I'd listened very carefully to the recommendations of the military, in particular, General Petraeus, and that the plan I announced was that we're making enough—based upon the fact we're making enough success in Iraq, that we can begin bringing some troops home; that I told the American people last night that we've got what's called return on success. I also told them that our commanders will have the flexibility and the troops needed to achieve the mission, which is an ally in this war on terror and a stable country that can self govern, a democracy in the heart of the Middle East.

I made it clear that the sacrifices that they and their families were going to make were necessary for the short-term and long-term security of the country; that we'd rather defeat the enemy overseas than have to face them here; that we fully understand—or I fully understand that if we were to be driven out of Iraq that the Middle East could be in chaos, and chaos would embolden Sunni extremists like Al Qaida, and chaos would embolden Iran; and that it's in our interests that we help Iraq succeed—it's not only in the interest—

our interests, but it's also in the Iraqis' interests.

I made it clear to them that there's a lot of courage in Iraq. These Iraqis are in the fight. But I also made it clear to them that we expect the Iraqi Government to enhance national reconciliation through the passage of law. I told them that I was able to give the speech because of the progress being made. I hope the American people listened very carefully to what our commanders and Ambassador Crocker had to say. They're there; they understand the progress that's being made.

I also made it clear that now's the chance for us to come together as a nation, that some of us who believe security was paramount were on opposite sides of a debate, where people said, "We just simply need to bring our troops home." Well, now we've got security in the right direction, and we are bringing our troops home. And I call upon the United States Congress to listen very carefully to what General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker reported and support the troop levels that these two men think are necessary to achieve our objective. I also expect the Congress to support our men and women in uniform and their families and those who have worn the uniform.

And so it's a great honor to be out here to speak with an incredible group of men and women. It's my honor to be their Commander in Chief.

Thank you for your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:43 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Statement on Signing the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007

September 14, 2007

Today I signed into law S. 1, the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007. This bill represents some progress towards ethics, lobbying, and earmark reform, all of which I strongly support. Strengthening the ethical standards that govern lobbying activities and beginning to address meaningful earmark reform are necessary steps to provide the public with a more transparent lawmaking process. The essence of successful ethics reform is not laws and restrictions, but full disclosure. The legislation includes minimal improvements in the area of disclosure, both for lobbying and earmarks. But there is still more to be done, and I will work with the Congress to improve upon this legislation.

For example, the bill holds Members of the Senate and executive branch employees to a much higher standard of conduct than Members of the House. The specific bill language is confusing, and I believe these increased restrictions would have a negative impact on recruitment and retention of Federal employees. I urge the Congress to make these standards more uniform and less confusing and to do so in a way that will not discourage public service.

In addition, this bill would have the effect of unreasonably burdening sitting Presidents' and Vice Presidents' reelection campaigns. I look forward to working with Congress to amend these provisions to provide a reasonable process for allocating the cost of Presidential and Vice Presidential campaign travel that is consistent with security needs.

I am pleased that the Congress has begun to make progress in bringing greater transparency to the earmarking process. However, this bill falls far short of the reform that American taxpayers deserve. I am concerned that there are potential loopholes in some of the earmark reforms included in this bill that would allow earmarks to escape sufficient scrutiny. This legislation also does not address other earmark reforms I have called on Congress to implement, such as ending the practice of putting earmarks in report language.

I thank members of both parties who worked on this legislation and look forward to working with the Congress to further advance ethics, lobbying, and earmark reform.

NOTE: S. 1, approved September 14, was assigned Public Law 110–81.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Benchmark Assessment Report September 14, 2007

To the Congress of the United States:

Consistent with section 1314 of the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007 (Public Law 110–28) (the "Act"), attached is a report that assesses the status of each of the 18 Iraqi

benchmarks contained in the Act and declares whether satisfactory progress toward meeting these benchmarks is, or is not, being achieved.

The second of two reports submitted consistent with the Act, it has been prepared in consultation with the Secretaries